

## THOUGHTS ON GVN/VC CONTROL

After a month of visiting Delta provinces and districts, I have concluded that the IV CTZ is basically a more secure area than the III CTZ. This is indeed an anomaly in that statistically III CTZ is far more secure. A single statistic is pertinent: only 300 of the 2,000 hamlets in III CTZ are carried as under VC control with over 200 of these being located in Long An Province alone; 1,700 of the 5,000 Delta hamlets are carried as being under VC control with only An Giang and Kien Tuong showing no VC controlled hamlets.

7 { I have devoted much thought and analysis toward satisfying myself as to why this confusing situation exists. The answer seemed to be that the much larger number of VC hamlets in the Delta reflected a favorable situation for the GVN as opposed to the apparently unfavorable nature of the statistics. This is because the VC, like any other "government," have an obligation to administer, defend and develop the 1,700 hamlets under their control, thus tying their forces down and limiting their capability to be aggressive against GVN controlled areas.

2 { To relate this to current policies and future actions, I call attention to the fact that we are involved in rapidly expanding GVN control using a "fast and thin" technique as opposed to a "slow and sure." This essentially was the object of the three-month "Accelerated Pacification Campaign" of late 1968 and early 1969. I look upon the Accelerated Pacification Campaign not as an overextension of the GVN, but merely as the final phase of the process of unwrapping the GVN from around the province and district flagpoles they had clustered to during the 1968 Tet offensive. In other words, this was merely getting better utilization of forces that were otherwise wasted in a reserve or standby position.

To some extent, I look upon the 1969 Pacification Plan as a continuation of the Accelerated Pacification Plan and with a good chance of success. I did disagree rather strongly with utilizing RD cadre in contested and VC controlled hamlets feeling that they should always have been used to pacify the areas already secure. Nevertheless, I consider that the 1969 plan to bring 90 per cent of the population under "GVN control" had a reasonable chance of success provided US forces would be available in sizeable numbers for several years.

My recent two trips to Washington and my conversations there with low ranking but influential people in policymaking offices lead me to believe that a precipitant US withdrawal from Vietnam is more than a remote possibility. In fact, it may even be a "probability" which should be considered in our pacification planning. Specifically, I see the possibility of now repeating the mistakes of 1961 - 1963. There is a certain corollary between the



Strategic Hamlet Program and the Accelerated Pacification Program in which we are presently engaged. It is a matter of historical record that the Strategic Hamlet Program had the effect of greatly decreasing the mobility of the GVN armed forces (by tying them down on static security in the strategic hamlets), while at the same time forcibly improving the mobility of the enemy by pushing them out of static security positions and causing them to band together in strike units. While this program initially appeared to be quite successful, a sufficient imbalance was reached wherein the "mobile" enemy forces reversed the tide and began gobbling up strategic hamlets. With the fall of President Diem, the VC "tide" rolled back the GVN at an ever increasing rate and the enemy momentum thus gained panicked the GVN and almost succeeded in causing its defeat in late 1964 and early 1965.

A precipitous withdrawal of US forces might be likened to the circumstances surrounding the downfall of President Diem, i. e., it could be the action that ~~allowed a gaining~~ <sup>gained</sup> enemy momentum, particularly if this withdrawal came on the heels of an overextension of GVN.

Specifically, I am questioning the wisdom of taking what might be the remaining one to two years of US presence in Vietnam and using this period in an attempt to gain major additional population control. It is obvious that there is no way to "wipe out" the enemy during this period and our actions' may well be setting the stage to permit him, particularly after we have forced him into a vastly more mobile role, to gobble up our newly acquired hamlets in the same manner that he did the strategic hamlets. If indeed the de-Americanization of this war is to be accomplished within one or two years, I am certain our present pacification policy is wrong. Even if the de-Americanization were to be over an extended period wherein we would not be below 200,000 Americans by 1972, our pacification policy may still be too ambitious.

I believe we should re-examine the direction in which we are now moving for the express purpose of determining whether the GVN position in later years would not be stronger if it had firmer control over less population than the predictably modest to weak control it may have over 90 per cent of the population if our 1969 program is successful. Coming back to my original premise, I see the 1,700 VC controlled hamlets in the Delta in the form of a "sponge" which soaks up enemy military, administrative and logistical resources and prevents these resources from being applied to attack the more prosperous and heavily populated areas under GVN control. It may even be that the best future for Vietnam and the easiest way to accomplish US objectives in Vietnam will be one wherein an Italian or French type legal Communist party exists with de facto control over the

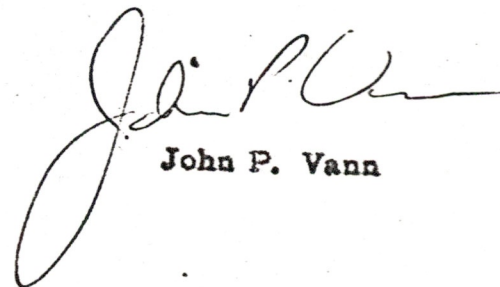


fringe areas. After all, the present area and population controlled by the GVN is far more important than that held by the enemy. Under a "recognition" of the VC right to control in these areas under peaceful conditions, it is highly likely that the ascendancy of the GVN over the VC would progress at a satisfactory rate because of the economic advantages of the former.

Since I have done this very hurriedly, let me reiterate the basic point, i.e., increased population control by the government spreads the government's strength more thinly and decreases the mobility of its armed forces and their reaction capability. At the same time, it increases the mobility of the enemy and decreases his logistical and administrative responsibilities. At some point, this may permit the enemy to piecemeal the government's position, and if this happens, at a time of national crisis, it could precipitate a downfall of the GVN.

I consider it necessary that we re-examine our present pacification policy in light of the possible developments in Paris.

2 April 1969



John P. Vann



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